

Perspectives from the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan & Iran



The Final Straw Radio

A chat with a translator of the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan and Iran to share perspectives from membership in Iran and abroad about resistance to the regime from within, solidarity from abroad, and the impact of US Sabre-rattling.

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This week on The Final Straw we feature a chat with a translator of the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan and Iran to share perspectives from membership in Iran and abroad about resistance to the regime from within, solidarity from abroad, the impact of US Sabre-rattling.

An inspirational movement arose out of the Cold War period among anarchists who found themselves on either side of the international chess-board. In the US this was called Neither East Nor West. The movement published a journal called On Gogol Boulevard, which after 1990, lived as a column in Profane Existence (an anarcho-punk journal), Fifth Estate and other journals. This project seems to have existed for about 15 years, from 1980 to 1994. The Final Straw lost the opportunity a few years ago to interview a New Yorker deeply engaged throughout this project, Bob McGlynn, when he passed away. He was obviously not the only person involved, but sharing his experience and story is a missed opportunity on our part. A link to an article that McGlynn penned about the project will be linked in our show notes.

Today, we find ourselves as anarchists in the USA, 20 years into the so-called War On Terror. This war of destabilization has targeted criminalized populations in within the U.S. borders and has had massively violent and deadly consequences across the globe. What we call a War, for lack of a better word, serves to destroy, enslave, maim and kill animals, human and non-human, around the world. And throughout the whole of this 20 year period a constant boogey-man has been that of the Iranian state, whose people have lived under the varying pressure of US-led sanctions. The US war machine hovers close to shifting from it's regional proxy wars and an active war with Iran as the Trump regime's rhetoric and economic policy close around the throats of the Iranian people.

In the interest of international solidarity and understanding and the spirit of the Neither East Nor West, we are quite pleased to be having a conversation with people from the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan and Iran. In this conversation we'll be learning about Iranian struggles and what solidarity from the West might look like. We hope that in the future we can talk more about the impact of the 20 years of war on the peoples of Afghanistan perpetrated by the US government and it's allies and the work of anti-authoritarians on the ground.

More information from the Union can be found at <https://asranarshism.com/> (posts are mostly in Persian), they can be followed on twitter at @asranarshism, @asranarshism on instagram, on Telegram (also mostly in Persian) and fedbook.

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Transcription of the interview with a member of AUAI

Thanks to A-Radio Berlin for the transcription. German translation available soon via that project.

TFSR: Today, we find ourselves as anarchists in the USA, 20 years into the so-called ‘War on Terror’. This war of destabilization has targeted criminalized populations within the US borders and has had massive violent and deadly consequences across the globe. What we call a war, for lack of a better word, serves to destroy, enslave and maim animals, human and nonhuman, around the world. And throughout this whole 20 year period, one of the constant boogeymen has been that of the Iranian state, whose people have lived under varying pressure from US-led sanctions. The US war machine hovers close to shifting from its regional proxy wars to an active war with Iran, as the Trump regime’s rhetoric and economic policy close around the throats of the Iranian people. In the interest of international solidarity and understanding and the spirit of ‘Neither East Nor West’, we’re quite pleased to be having a conversation with a translator from the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan and Iran. In this conversation, we’ll be learning about Iranian struggles and what solidarity from the West might look like. We hope that in the future we can talk more about the impact of the 20 years of war on the peoples of Afghanistan, perpetrated by the US government at its allies, and the work of anti-authoritarians on the ground.

So, right now I’m speaking with a translator from the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan and Iran. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak and do you want to introduce yourself further than that?

AUIA: Thank you for having me. And no, that’s adequate, thank you.

The Union is composed of the ‘Anarchist Era Collective’, which is a community of anarchists from Afghanistan and Iran, operating both inside and outside of the respective countries, ‘Aleyh’, an anarchist group based out of Afghanistan and the ‘Revolutionary Radical Anarchist Front’ who is based in Iran. Our members are about two thirds in Afghanistan and Iran and one third outside of them. With many of those in Europe, Canada, and the United States. The vast majority of our new members are recruited from within Afghanistan and Iran. The reason why it is those two

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countries is because they share Persian as a lingua franca, referred to as Farsi in Iran, or Farsi and Dari in Afghanistan. Peoples in these territories as well share similar struggles and the states of the respective countries and the political elites share commonalities as well. We have many points of unity, though one thing to know is that we are open to all anarchists, except pacifists, sectarian religious anarchists and those who call themselves so-called ‘anarcho-capitalists’. Due to different situations on the ground in Afghanistan and Iran, we embrace a multitude of different strategies and except many different tendencies of anarchists, depending on the situations that they face.

TFSR: Can you give an explanation very briefly, of why – I can understand why an-caps, because they are not real, and partisan-religious anything wouldn’t be able to work with other people without those other people turning to their side, so that makes sense. What is it about the pacifist anarchists that puts them in with those other categories of groups that can’t be a part of the Union?

AUIA: Our reason for not accepting pacifists into the Anarchist Union is that pacifism does not effectively confront the state and in many ways reifies the legitimacy of the state. We also accept the necessity of armed struggle and armed self-defense, which pacifism does not encompass. But for people on the ground in the struggles and protests in Iran, it is necessary for us to use violence when necessary against the regime.

TFSR: That makes sense. So, as we’re speaking, tensions are ratcheting up between the US regime and the Irani regime. What does the Anarchist Union think about the assassination of major general Qasem Suleimani of the Quds Force, of the Irani Revolutionary Guard and how has the assassination affected living and resisting under the regime? How have people reacted to the states threatening one another?

AUIA: We are happy that Qasem Suleimani is dead and many found his death cathartic. He has been terrorizing the region in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, as well as in Afghanistan for quite some time and he was an important figure within the Revolutionary Guard, which unleashes domestic forces on protesters, demonstrators frequently, including the uprising in November. At the same time, we also condemn the reckless actions of Trump’s executive branch in Iraq and their self-interested strike, which

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served to stir up tensions in the region and bring more suffering on Iraqis and Syrians who are in the lines of fire. This recent international incident emerges from decades of conflict between opposing imperialist blocks, who are largely responsible for the wars, famines, and displacement of many people, that is so common now in the Middle East.

We believe that the death of Suleimani will not change Iran's approach in regions that border it because his longtime deputy commander Esmail Ghaani is being appointed to replace him as commander of the Quds. As well the militia leader who was killed, al-Muhandis, his death will not end his militia or any other militia that Iran backs. On the opposite side, Iraq did request American forces leave, and many NATO operations were suspended during the last week, but there is no indication Western powers will dramatically change their policies or their presence in Iraq. So far there has been little effect on resistance under the regime. There was a day of state mourning, there were many state-mandated parades, and the regime banned any sort of protests or rallies against these.

There may be a lull due to a nationalist fervor, but it will not last long, because the economic conditions, the domestic conditions, the repression, that is forced on the Iranian people, will lead to riots and uprisings again. For this, we're pretty certain. In Iran, the regime's reaction has to be understood as well within the upcoming election. There is an election that is being held in Iran on February 21st 2020, and the strong condemnation and retaliation to the strike by the Americans was expected. So if Trump has an election, he's currently in the cycle, he's campaigning for, so too are Iranian politicians.

TFSR: What are the conditions of life in Iran under the regime? Many listeners in the West and in the US, in particular, will be curious to learn about the experience of day-to-day life. We understand that Iran is a large and heterogeneous territory, so whatever you can do to inform us, will be appreciated.

AUIA: The current situation should be seen as a part of the 40-year history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was the regime that was born in 1979, during the revolution. The current situation is a result of four decades of divisions and splits within the government and since the beginning the regime has been gradually eliminating one group after another.

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er that has supported the revolution, getting rid of parties and curtailing their prominence and stopping political participation and excluding voices from the political arena that don't support the revolution that occurred in 1979. While there are elections, the people who may run for the elections are carefully chosen by the Guardian Committee. So they are not the same as elections that happen in the US or Canada, where the party apparatuses are responsible for electing their own representatives to run as leaders of the parties or as presidents.

In the economic arena as well, there is a large gap in income. A majority of Iranians are either in absolute poverty, or they're in relative poverty. There is a large working class, as well as a large unemployed population. And this is because neoliberal policies are being imposed by the Iranian regime, to kind of pave the way for the seizure of public property by political elites, and the impoverishment of many. Money that could be redistributed to the people has been instead funneled towards proxy wars that Iran is fighting as well as being funneled into the hands of clerics and the Revolutionary Guard. Iranian state assets are owned by four organizations, including the 'Holy Shrine of Imam Reza', the 'Foundation of the Oppressed', and the 'Seal of the Prophets'. These organizations own companies in vast amounts of wealth and assets, including various factories and companies, as well as property that was confiscated from the Shah Regime. And the policies that Iran pursues, by taking much of the economy for the elite and to fund proxy wars and their own repression, is having a negative effect on the country and the livelihoods of normal people who live there.

TFSR: For listeners that are in the US and are concerned around the sanctions that the US has been imposing, it sounds basically like it's just being passed on to the population and not actually affecting the policies and choices of the regime directly in Iran. Does this seem like a correct assessment?

AUIA: Yes, that is a correct assessment. Though some businesses and some members of the Iranian regime do feel the pressures of the economic sanctions, much of the actual burden of these is held by regular people.

TFSR: Could you talk about the protests that rocked Iran in November? Their genesis, and what role, if any, anarchists played in them?

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And also what sort of political, social, religious or gender strata participated in the protests? Were there demands? And how successful was it? Sorry, that's a very big question.

If you want to more generally, would you tell us about those protests? And who participated, what went on, and how they went?

AUIA: These protests emerged from the pressure of US economic sanctions because they've paralyzed the government, which means that the regime is facing a severe budget deficit. A first spark for these protests was the regime deciding to cut the subsidies for gasoline in order to pay for some of the other parts of their budget. This created an outcry from the vulnerable parts of society and those who were lower income. What is perhaps surprising is that many of those who form the base of pro-government support were out in the streets: the lower classes. And they have been driven onto the streets to protest because of the economic pressure and the organized corruption in the country.

There are also reports of young people from affluent classes as well as people from the middle class and many students who joined. However, we can suspect that it wasn't necessarily economic reasons that made those protesters join in the demonstrations. As to anarchist presence, there was serious and widespread anarchist participation in the protest that happened in November of this year as well as December 2017/2018. In the aftermath of the 2017/2018 protests, we know of at least some anarchists who were arrested and tortured, though it is not clear to us that the government knew that they were anarchists. And the Union does not have links with all Iranian anarchists, so we don't know how many were arrested or were killed. As for this November, as far as we know, there were no anarchists associated with the Union who were arrested or killed, but again, we can't know of the fate of all anarchists. And anarchists have participated in the uprising in different ways, in each location, because it involved a variety of different events, different rallies, different marches, depending on the circumstances and the severity of state response. We can't really get into that due to security reasons.

But during these protests, there were three key drivers that brought people to the streets, and those were domestic politics, the economic situation, as well as the international policies of Iran. People were in the streets

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protesting Iran's involvement in Syria, in Iraq and in Lebanon. We also know that Afghan refugees participated in the demonstrations because nine were killed, and many more were arrested. So we know that there was widespread participation by all classes and people in society against the regime, and the economic situation, and the imperialism that Iran has been inflicting on the rest of the region.

TFSR: There was what appeared to be an inconsistency between those two answers and so I would like to just address that and get a clarification if that's ok. Because in the prior question that I asked [you said that the economic sanctions do not affect the Iranian regime]. So the sanctions are in fact affecting the regime, but the elite as individuals don't feel the burden as much as the majority of the population, is that a correct understanding? Because you said that subsidies had lead to...

AUIA: So, the regime as a whole and the political elite as a class, do not feel the burden of the economic sanctions. They don't go without food, they have plenty of fuel, it hasn't affected their electricity or their internet, it hasn't affected their day-to-day life. It has affected the running of the Iranian state. And Instead of directing money to the people, who are feeling the burden of the sanctions, they're instead hoarding the money for themselves or using the money to rage proxy wars.

TFSR: The Iranian government has shut off the internet in a reaction to protests at various times. Can you talk about the impact that this has had on the resistance in Iran and social and technical workarounds that people have constructed or found?

AUIA: Definitely. Shutting off the internet did a great deal of damage to internet businesses, but did not have too much of an effect on protests themselves. The protests had begun before the internet crash and while the shutdown did limit the amount of information we could receive from the streets, people instead just decided to speak face-to-face, and they didn't really use internet access to create the protests, to begin with, and so they just continued not using the internet. Given the events that happened over that week, we don't believe the internet had much of an effect of protests, people tend to be organizing these protests and getting involved in demonstrations against the state through face-to-face interactions. Considering that many common social media tools that activists

use in the West and other places to organize clandestinely with encryption and security aren't available in Iran. And some apps and platforms such as Twitter are not accessible in Iran without VPN services.

TFSR: We often hear in the West about the Iranian state repression for feminist stances, for queerness, unorthodox religious expression and practice. How much is day-to-day life policed around issues of gender, sexuality, and religion? How free are people to live their identities as they see fit, love and worship as they will, and how much room culturally is there for these expressions?

AUIA: Day-to-day life in Iran is heavily policed, and one of the main organs that polices the expression of sexuality and gender is the Gashte Ershad, which translates to the Guidance Patrol, they're also known as the morality police. We can see the effects of repression of women especially through the symbolic videos that have been coming out of Iran of women taking off their hijab. That doesn't mean they're not Muslims, it doesn't mean they're anti-Islam, but it means that they are performing a symbolic protest to reject the type of the Islamic rules that are imposed by the state. In general, women, all religious minorities, oppressed genders, and minority nationalities are under constant police pressure and control, they're subjected to constant repression. Women must usually travel with a father or a husband or some other male guardian, and there are many human rights issues that Iranian feminists attempt to address.

LGBTQ people are oppressed by the religious police and the Iranian state's interpretation of Islamic law, meaning that if a homosexual is discovered and it's proved that they have had gay sex, they can suffer a death sentence. Largely, relations between men and women in society are very limited and in public, there is always police supervision or Guidance Patrols, who are tasked with enforcing the coverage of women, and the separation between young men and women. There are instances that even at parties that people are having in their own homes, police and Guidance Patrols come to attack them and arrest those who are in attendance if they find that the party is in breach with any of the state's laws. The Iranian state has used religion to create this prison for marginalized peoples.

TFSR: So the last question didn't really touch on ethnic differences, and you mentioned ethnic minorities and repression from the Irani-

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an regime. Can you talk about the struggles of non-Persian peoples within Iran, the forms that those struggles take and the relationship between the Anarchist Union and those struggles? You already mentioned that the union has a stance in support of armed struggle against the Iranian state.

AUIA: As you have said, we are supportive of armed struggle against the Iranian state, and we have made two communiqués calling for an armed united front to defend unarmed protesters from security forces during these demonstrations and further uprisings. Iran has different ethnic groups and they all have their own struggles. The territory of Iran is home to many different peoples who speak Iranic languages, such as Balochs, Kurds, Lari, Luri, Mazandarani, Bashkardis, just to name a few, as well as Arab speakers. There are speakers of Turkic languages, like Yazidi. As a nation-state, Iran has continued ‘Persianization’, to forcibly assimilate non-Persian nationalities. Many minorities are kept out of the decision making positions in their regions, by Tehran, many languages are also discriminated against and economic distribution is kept away from minority regions, like Baluchestan and Kurdistan. Tehran wants access to resources in these regions and strategic ports and roadways but wants to keep the local people suppressed. The Anarchist Union had run a Twitter poll, and although Twitter accounts for about 10% of Iranian internet users and there aren’t too many Iranian internet users, according to the poll, out of Iran’s 31 provinces there are 30 with anarchists. There are anarchists among all the non-Persian ethnicities. There are also anarchists in the only province that no anarchists selected for the poll, but they don’t use Twitter or the internet and they can’t participate in those polls.

We shouldn’t forget that in Iran, anarchists are largely disadvantaged and impoverished and don’t always have access to the internet or to an internet café, and rarely have access to smartphones with that capability. The Anarchist Union itself does not rely solely on its own members and has a multitude of anarchist audiences and groups who coordinate union activities without direct contact to keep it decentralized for security reasons. We don’t want everybody to be in direct contact with us or to be a member of the Union because that could leave the Union open to being targeted easier by the Iranian regime. Many of the anarchists are movement-oriented and involved in many different initiatives including ethnic minority struggles. Non-Persian anarchists mainly fall outside of ethnic

parties, that are organized, and have their own independent activities as anarchists that we are either about in contact with or indirectly coordinate with, though the non-Persian peoples of Iran and their anarchists are definitely involved in union activities and we do respond to the need and the struggles of everyone who lives under the Iranian regime.

TFSR: A painful truth of ignorance is the inability to see the bounds of that ignorance. Would you please speak about Orientalist approaches of Western leftists and anarchists as you've experienced it as the Union, as least since you've participated in the Anarchist Union of Afghanistan and Iran? And insights that we in the West can act from to overcome some of these shortcomings?

AUIA: Western leftists are very quick to defend states opposed to the US. Western chauvinism prioritizes a worldview that centers the United States and therefore makes opposing American imperialism at the expense of other states a priority. This orientalism subordinates the struggles of Afghans and Iranians who have to confront both their own governments, as well as many competing international interests. Many Western leftists are ignorant of the complexity of situations in places like Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Instead of listening to authoritarians on the ground or in the diaspora, they are quick to make judgments that confirm their own biases about the United States and American imperialism. For example, we receive negative feedback from Western leftists, mostly Marxists, to our own statements to the death of Qasem Suleimani, because we condemned him and found catharsis in his death in addition to condemning reckless American actions. For the Union, it is paramount that we both oppose American sanctions and warmongering as well as the Iranian regime's corruption and brutal oppression. The insight that Western leftists can take away is to focus on and raise up the voices of those who are suffering from oppression abroad and people of those diasporas who have rigorous analyses of all imperialisms, not merely reflexively falling back on American imperialism and its allies.

TFSR: I raise that question because there is a certain brand of authoritarian leftists. In the US, and in the West I guess, we have a brand of so-called leftism that often supports repressive states that are viewed to be oppositional to the US state. However, they are also standing on the throats of the people that they claim to rule over. So, often we call

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those people ‘Tankies’. That nickname came from a derisive nickname, an insult for British communists who supported the Stalinist repression of Hungarian workers’ democracy in 1956. So, that is kind of why I raise this question because we have also gotten some push-back for trying to help amplify the voices, to American audiences mostly, of people in resistance in Hong Kong or Rojava. And ‘Tankies’ come at us on Twitter and they’re like ‘actually, you’re just anti-Chinese’, or ‘Assad is actually a Socialist’. Can you talk a little more about ‘Tankies’?

AUIA: Of course. ‘Tankies’ represent a threat to internationalism, especially in the region of Afghanistan and Iran. They support the Iranian regime even though Iran represses and targets anarchists as well as Marxists. They support the Assad regime, which is opposed to leftist thought as well as liberty and egalitarianism and has waged a war to keep authoritarianism in that country. They go back, as you said, they support the People’s Republic of China, as well as supporting Russia and Putin. For us, it seems that these self-described leftists do not support any sort of leftism, they have merely taken up a different imperialist block in these struggles. And they’re again centering the United States and Western action and agency, rather than centering the resistance of people who live in the places where struggles are ongoing and where different imperialist blocs are attempting to influence the region to install governments that are amicable to them. This creates complications in their geopolitics, especially in the case of Afghanistan, where the Americans have been waging a decades-long occupation and the Afghan state has been fighting a civil war against the Taliban. However, the Taliban are being supported by Iran, Russia, and China, as well as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and Pakistan. So, for the ‘tankie’ this raises a question: if Iran and China and Russia are always on the side of anti-imperialism, would that make the Taliban anti-imperialist? Would that make Pakistan, who also supports the Taliban, anti-imperialist? We also must look back.

‘Tankies’ often defend the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and present the Mujahedin as the precursors of al-Qaida, even though al-Qaida were Arabs and not Afghans. The Afghan Mujahedin was also supported by Iran and Suleimani himself participated in supporting the Northern Alliance that fought against the Taliban, which the Americans also supported. So we see how the pragmatic opportunism of Iran and other imperialist states sometimes coincides with American and other imperialist interests that

these ‘Tankies’ definitely don’t support and these are problems with their worldview. It is based on some simple heuristics that they know about the world and that they apply to everything in order to make it simple. And perhaps in isolation, they can make sense but they can’t explain the global system unless they out and out become supporters of Russian imperialism or Iranian imperialism globally.

TFSR: That point is very well made. And I could see them – I mean if people relate the Mujahedin to the Taliban, there is the Osama bin Laden connection, right?

AUIA: Following the fall of the PDPA (the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan) government, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, that was ruled by Najibullah, who was installed by the Soviets, there was a civil war among Mujahedin commanders. And out from the Pakistani refugee camps, where Afghans were kept, emerged the Taliban movement and it joined the civil war. So the Taliban were largely fighting against who we would think of as the Mujahedin. And the Northern Alliance and many of the political elite that formed a coalition government are from the Mujahedin but they are also from the PDPA. So, the narrative that the Mujahedin became the Taliban is not true. There are fighters from the Mujahedin who joined the Taliban but by and large, the majority of factions and commanders that fought in the Mujahedin opposed the Taliban.

And to the second point of bin Laden: bin Laden was responsible for Maktab al-Khidamat which was an organization that helped bring Arab fighters, Arab foreign fighters, to Afghanistan, and fight in the Mujahedin against the Soviets. They never brought very many, they may have been no more than 5,000 in Afghanistan at any point in time. Most of the money that was raised by bin Laden came from private investors in the Gulf states. Some of the money came from Saudi Arabia’s security apparatuses directly, in order to do things that they did not want the Americans or the Pakistanis to know about because the Americans and the Saudi government were funneling money through the Pakistani Intelligence Agency, the ISI, and the ISI controlled the distribution of funds to the major Mujahedin groups. So, there’s no evidence to suggest that the Americans had any ties to bin Laden. Most of the time that comes from orientalism and assuming that Afghans and Arabs are the same, and that bin Laden was a participant in the Afghan Mujahedin, which he was not.

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TFSR: Thank you for the clarification.

Switching gears a little bit: Anarchists in other parts of the world may be interested to learn about how you all from the Anarchist Union learned about anarchism, what anarchism looks like in Iran, such as what tendencies or influences there are. Maybe if it has subcultural roots in Punk or Metal as can be seen in a lot of other parts of the world or if it comes more from labor roots? And does the praxis hold any particular religious, secular, or anti-religious sentiment?

AUIA: Our own praxis definitely holds secular sentiment, and there are some who hold anti-religious sentiments. Much like Bakunin who said, “no gods, no masters” when he was living under a time of Christian hierarchy and when Christian organizations represented an authoritarian presence in society, so too does anti-religious sentiment stem from the authoritarian usage of Islam by the Iranian regime. What we have found is that there are many anarcho-syndicalists in Iran. However, there are also anarchists of other tendencies as well, anarcho-feminists, green anarchists, anarcho-communists, and other anarchist tendencies. Many people do not emphasize a branch or tendency of anarchism that they hold, they merely say that they are anarchists. Since 1979 there have been translations of anarchist works that have made their way into Iran, normally in zines. There are European, Western thinkers like Bakunin or Kropotkin who were able to introduce anarchism into Iran. Though anarchism in the region goes back further. There were Armenian anarchists and other anarchists, who were located close to the Ottoman Empire and Iran, that wrote in Persian as well as other languages, like Armenian and Turkish. So there is anarchist literature that is from the region as well.

TFSR: Iran is one of the states that overlap with Kurdistan. We would be curious to hear what sort of impact the Rojava revolution has had within Iran, particularly since decentralization, agnosticism, and plurality, feminism, and anti-capitalism appear as they might be in conflict with the aims of the Iranian, and any, state.

AUIA: Yes, we take inspiration from Kurds in northern Syria who are part of the PYD and the other groups who are part of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Autonomous Administration of North-Eastern Syria. They have shown us another political system that strives to achieve a society

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where there is respect for all citizens. In addition to that, they have opposed imperialism and reactionary politics by fighting against the Islamic State as well as Erdogan's fascist government in Turkey. In addition to this, there is an equivalent to the PYD and PKK operating in Iran, called PJAK, and they are present in the North-west and western provinces, such as Kurdistan, West-Azerbaijan, Kermanshah. And they have been waging a domestic armed struggle against the Iranian regime for quite some time with the support of their affiliated organizations. We also encourage everyone to participate in protest actions and rallies that support northern Syria and communities there.

TFSR: Iran is surrounded by nations destabilized by US wars over the last 20 years and beyond, and the borders are often just lines in the sand. The news hit the US media this year that much of the power vacuum left within Iraq by the US invasion and occupation has been filled by the Iranian government and its proxies. This comes as the US puppet state has failed to realize, unsurprisingly and thanks in part to the extremists and the extremism and ethic and religious feuds stoked by the US leading to the rise of Daesh and other groups... Unsurprisingly they haven't been able to reach stability, this puppet government. Recent protest movements in the streets of Iraq have called for jobs, for security, for self-determination. This has been met with bloody consequences at the hands of security forces and para-state actors like those militias. Can you talk about the relationship between Iraq and Iran in this period and maybe give an assessment of the recent struggles in Iraq? Is there any chance of extending the Anarchist Union into Iraq as well?

AUIA: The situation in Iraq needs to take into account that Iraq and Iran have been in conflict since shortly after the Iranian revolution. There was a decade long war, the Iraq-Iran war, and following that and the invasion and occupation by the United States, Iran has been attempting to influence and control the Iraqi government. So recently Iran has played the role of regional imperialist by creating mercenary Muslim groups, they're mostly Shia, to export their revolution throughout the Shiite Crescent, and they are injecting large amounts of money to support their own state intervention and support non-state proxy groups throughout the region. This is largely being done by the Quds force and was built by the late Suleimani. So far the amount of money that the Iranian government has

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pumped into militias and segments of the Iraqi government has been successful. And parts of the Iraqi government have begun affiliating with Iran. And we can see that from parts of the Iranian security apparatus opening fire on protesters in October who were protesting against Iranian imperialism, as well as instances of Iranian-backed militia members joining the police or the Iraqi military and firing on Americans. Much of the Iraqi resistance was suppressed and crushed by affiliated organizations of the Iranian regime including their militias and Qasem Suleimani played a large role in these events. Many of the activists in the Iraqi people's movement were assassinated or tortured by Iran and Iranian-backed forces. And the struggles extent beyond Iraq to Lebanon, Iran itself, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria. All of these conflicts are intertwined because of the amount of money that Iran is spending and the organizing that they are doing to create militias in these areas or to infiltrate groups that already exist, like the Taliban which I mentioned previously. And if the Iranian regime falls, then the peoples in these countries will witness the collapse of the Iranian infiltrated parts of their own governments and the Iranian-backed militias would be defeated or disintegrated very easily without the constant funding from Tehran.

Speaking about anarchists, in Iraq, there are many anarchists in the Kurdish part and there are anarchists throughout Iraq as a whole but in order for our Anarchist Union to expand into the geographical area of Iraq, we would need more people in the Union to know Arabic, as that's the language of the majority of the population in Iraq. And currently, we are focusing on Persian-language content and the struggles of people who speak Persian.

TFSR: Yeah, that makes sense. So in the West, we hear in our media and from the US government that the survival of Jews in West Asia is only possible by repression of the Iranian state through sanctions and military actions, in defense of Israel as a state. May people, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and of other faiths, or a lack of faiths, or various identities, suffer under the Israeli state. Has there been any show of solidarity between anarchists and anti-authoritarians living under these regimes and can you say some words about the role of religious regimes and stoking hatred among working peoples? Do you have any hope that international solidarity could surpass these limitations?

AUIA: We've seen demonstrations of solidarity from Palestinians and
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other people who are living under this regime and we have shown solidarity in return. We see the function of religion by oppressive regimes is similar to the functions of how fascist regimes operate. They create hatred among their people and fear and creating internal enemies through the use of propaganda. And this hatred is not only confined to religious differences, as it reinforces ethnic differences, racial differences, and the differences between nationalities. And it has produced, along with the colonial borders in the Middle East, much of the tension and ongoing conflicts that we see. We believe our international solidarity has already broken the barriers in many cases, we have developed very strong international relations with anarchists and resistance groups in other parts of the Middle East and are hoping to be better able to support and show solidarity with them in the future too.

TFSR: What should folks living in the United States or other Western states know about resistance in Iran? What can we do to support liberation struggles in Iran and against the State in Capital And how can we build stronger bonds across borders? Is there a way to avoid having our support being used by the Iranian regime as a reason for further repression?

AUIA: Resistance in Iran is very difficult. There is minimal access to secure communications technology in order for people to plan actions. It is also illegal and heavily policed to have demonstrations and have protests and rallies, where it is very easy in Western countries to either get permits or have spontaneous protests. This means that Iranians must operate clandestinely or wait for massive uprisings and demonstrations that the police can't immediately respond to and must bring in the Revolutionary Guard or the military in order to suppress. Supporting Iranians fighting in Iran must at the minimum include criticism of the regime. Support that valorizes the regime as anti-imperialist in any way makes it difficult to create internationalist support for Iranian resistance. This is something that we see in Hong Kong as well as Iran and other parts of the world, where authoritarian self-described leftists are very quick to support the imperialist power, whether it would be the People's Republic of China or Iran and this leads to conservatives, republicans, hawkish liberals, being opportunists and siding with, say Hong Kong or Iranian protesters merely because it suits their interests because they oppose Iran or China geopolitically. And as internationalist leftists, we should not allow that to

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happen and we should not cede that space to conservatives. Western leftists cannot hesitate to show solidarity with Iranian and Afghan struggles against their own states and all imperialist actors for that reason.

The Union has been approached by organizations around the world, in Belarus and Mexico, to exchange written interviews to learn more about the struggle happening in other places and this is a way to build stronger bonds between borders and share struggles and the ways that different anarchist groups approach those struggles and approach confronting their own states as well as the other international interests that have effects on their lives.

TFSR: Are there any topics that I failed to ask you about, that you would like to address?

AUIA: No, I think we covered them all.

TFSR: We covered a lot. Can you talk about how folks can learn more and keep up on the struggles of Iranian anarchists and anti-authoritarians? How can we keep up on the Union in particular?

AUIA: You can keep up with our work by following the Twitter of our media collective @asranarshism where we post translations of our communiqués and statements as well as news and prisoner letters that have been translated. You can also visit our website which you can find on our Twitter, though it is primarily made for Persian speakers. However, all of the translated content you can find by searching our Twitter handle. You can also access and join the Telegram group, though that is also largely written in Farsi.

TFSR: Well thank you so much for taking this time to chat and going through the effort personally of translating these words from Farsi on the spot, I really appreciate this. And also I realized a thing before we started chatting that after I sent you the questions and that little script about ‘Neither East Nor West’. I didn’t realize that that was actually one of the chants that were used within the Iranian revolution which was, of course, a lot of different tendencies pushing before Ayatollah Khomeini took over and his group took over. I really like the idea of sharing information and building solidarity through it, so thank you so much for participating in this.

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The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humors) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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